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Messages of the Saints

Edited by ALFRED W. POLLARD

# ST CATHERINE OF SIENA

*UNIFORM WITH THIS VOLUME*

ST FRANCIS POVERELLO

By LAURENCE HOUSMAN

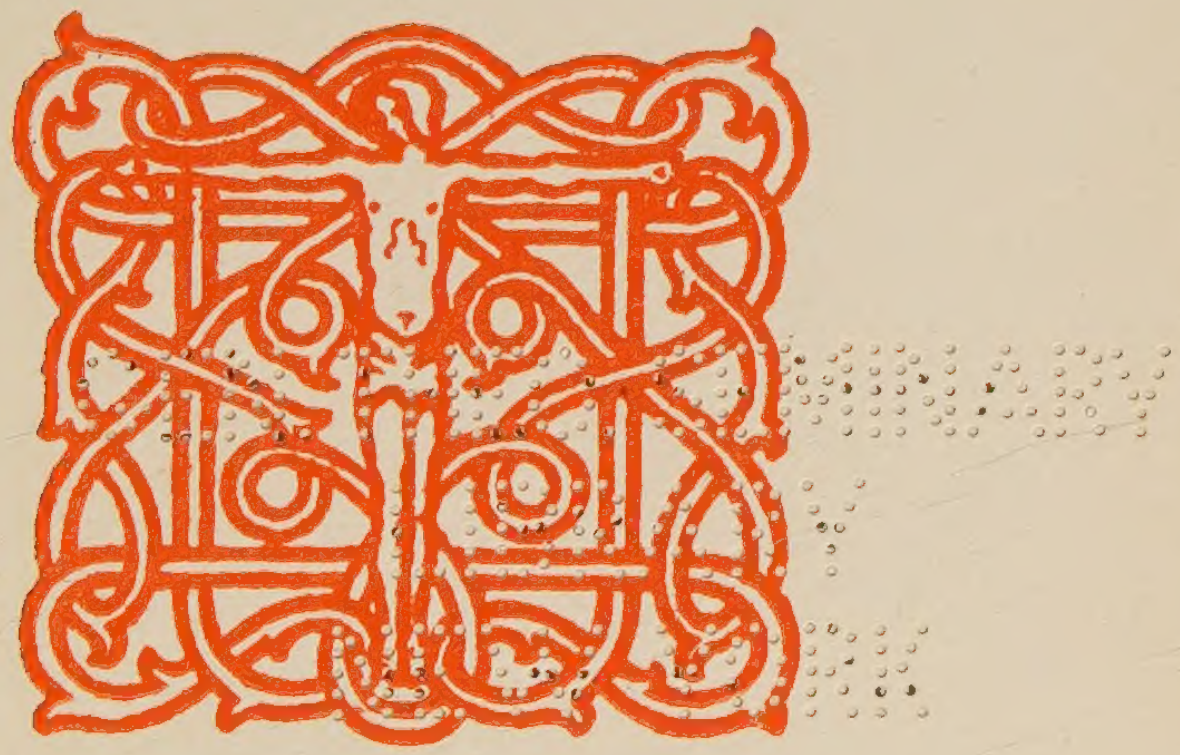
(With an Introduction to the Series by A. W. POLLARD)

BLESSED JOAN OF ARC

By A. MAUDE ROYDEN

# ST CATHERINE OF SIENA

BY ALFRED W. POLLARD



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# PREFACE

IT is hoped that this sketch of St Catherine of Siena may persuade any readers it may obtain to turn for fuller knowledge of her to Professor Edmund Gardner's *Saint Catherine of Siena: a Study in the Religion, Literature and History of the Fourteenth Century in Italy* (J. M. Dent & Co., 1907), to which it is deeply indebted; to Matilde Fiorilli's edition of the *Libro della Divina Dottrina* (Bari, Gius. Laterza & Figli, 1912), or, failing that, to the English translation of it by Algar Thorold (Kegan Paul & Co., 1896; second edition, abridged, 1907), and to her letters, either in the originals or in Miss Vida D. Scudder's English selection from them (*St Catherine of Siena as seen in her Letters.* J. M. Dent & Co., 1905). In the present sketch there is nothing original, save possibly its point of

view and (I believe) the chapter on St Catherine's Book.

Since this note was written Professor Gardner has added to my debt by reading my proofs.

A. W. P.

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# CHAPTER I

## PREPARATION

THE saints have done many wonderful things, but few of their achievements strike the imagination more vividly than that of the woman, the daughter of a Sienese dyer, so little educated that until nearly the end of her life she could not write her own letters, who brought back the Pope from Avignon to Rome in the teeth of the College of Cardinals. Of her, as of her Master, the question might well have been asked: "By what authority doest thou these things?" To see for ourselves, as best we may, how St Catherine gained her authority, her power to influence others, is the problem before us. Nor is it one of merely antiquarian or historical interest. She lived in days when greed and cruelty and lust made all Italy seethe with pain, as greed and cruelty and lust have made all

Europe seethe during the last five years. Her love could not overcome a world so bent on evil, yet it was great, and while she lived she helped many and went on helping them after her death. In every century since she died men and women have found her helpful, and perhaps she should be most helpful in times so like her own.

Catherine Benincasa was born on Lady Day, 1347, the year before the Great Plague. She was a jolly little child, so bright and sunny in her ways that the neighbours all called her Euphrosyne (which, even in the pretty Italian form Eufrosina, seems a very learned and classical way of praising her), and though she played her childish play at being an anchoress, creeping home at dusk when nothing exciting happened, and saw her childish vision—the Lord Christ apparelled as a Pope, with St Peter, St Paul and St John, appearing in the sky over the great Church of San Domenico in the tanner's quarter of Siena—she seemed normal enough to those around her. Despite the fact that

she was the twenty-fourth child born of the same mother she was strong, and in her prime could carry an ass's load up the steep to her house. According to her confessor-biographer (a truthful man, no doubt reporting what she had told him), when she was no more than six she made up her mind to have no husband, no betrothed, but Christ. Yet later on, when she was approaching what was considered a marriageable age, she let her hair be dyed and dressed herself prettily to please an elder sister, herself a wife, whom she dearly loved, and this did not look like an ascetic. But in August, 1362, when Catherine was four or five months over fifteen, this favourite sister, Bonaventura, was taken from her by death; Catherine's grief was great, and it would seem as if the remembrance of her sister's counsels to her added bitterness to it. She had come to one of the halting places of life, where roads separate, and had now no doubt as to which was hers.

In the strenuous city life of mediæval Siena

even a moderately well-to-do dyer might need to strengthen his position by politic marriages, and now that Bonaventura's death had weakened one bulwark, Catherine's parents desired that she should marry a man who might be used as another. But at this point Catherine's will, if it had ever wavered, was finally fixed : she would have no spouse but Christ. Her mother, Lapa, had a will also, and resolved that as her daughter would not marry she should work and have no time for dreaming ; so Catherine was set to do the drudgery of the house and given no solitude, day or night. She submitted with patience and something more. She " made believe " (the childish phrase suits the simplicity of the story) that her father was the Lord Christ, her mother Our Lady, her brothers and sisters the apostles. With such a tale in her head it became easy to serve them not merely patiently, but joyfully ; and she did so. Of course after a little time her father gave way. How could he do otherwise? He called the family together and declared

his will that Catherine should no more be reproached, but be released from her drudgery and given a little room to herself, to order her own life there as she thought best.

A sinner who writes about saints must always remember that there is probably much in them which his sins incapacitate him from understanding, but to belittle the saints by avoiding or minimising distasteful facts is a poor kind of biography. Let it be owned then that in the judgment of this lover of St Catherine she put her newly gained freedom to a bad use. For three years she lived the life of an anchoress in her little room, leaving it only to go to Mass, speaking to no one save her confessor, or those whom her confessor brought to her. Moreover she tortured very cruelly the body which God had given her. We are told that she had been wont to scourge herself severely even as a little child, and that when her parents, in order to win her to their views as to marriage, had sought to divert her with the gaieties of the baths of Vignone, she had

deliberately scalded herself badly in order to gain an insight into the pains of hell and purgatory. When the freedom to rule her own life was given her she disciplined herself much more severely, using the scourge three times a day, and wearing a steel chain which cut her flesh.[1] She lived at first on bread and water and herbs; then on bread and water alone; then took hardly any food at all. By a great effort she reduced her sleep also almost to nothing, sometimes, it is said, to no more than half-an-hour in two days. She desired earnestly to be accepted as one of the Mantellate, a society of women, mostly of advanced age, who wore cloaks of Dominican black and white, and were under the rule of the Order, though they continued to live in their own homes. The Mantellate of Siena were naturally averse to receiving so young a postulant, but were induced

[1] We may rejoice with Mr Gardner that she abstained from inflicting on herself a hair shirt, because it could not be kept clean. She was modern in refusing to believe that holiness could be enhanced by dirt.

to consent—if she were not too pretty. Catherine's biographers are agreed that the attraction of her face lay in no sensuous charm, but we are told that the condition the Mantellate imposed was the more easily satisfied as she was just then recovering from an illness which had greatly, though only for a time, disfigured her. Her acceptance by the Mantellate is best dated early in 1363, and this suggests that her austerities even by this time were telling on her. Soon she was never free from pain, though she took little heed of it and never let it disturb her cheerfulness. The one pain which she seems to have found intolerable was that brought on by taking food, so that when the extremity of her fast became a subject of angry comment, as if she fasted more than others for her own glory, or were claiming to live miraculously without food, and she tried to avoid scandal by eating when she knew she was observed, she was driven afterwards to excite vomiting artificially.

To what degree self-isolation, the torture

of the body and the denial to it of needful food and sleep for months and years can in any conceivable case help the soul need not here be discussed. Let it suffice to register the belief that such "austerities" cannot be helpful or right for any woman between the years of sixteen and nineteen, and were not in themselves helpful or right for Catherine, that the confessors who sanctioned these practices grievously misled her, and that the spiritual progress she made during these years was due not to the practices themselves but to the strength, the courage, the pure devotion of the will with which she pursued them. Fra Raimondo, who later on became her confessor and lived to compile her Legend, writes in a curious passage as if she invented this way of life for herself. It was surely a road well recognised in her day and recommended to those who had the strength to lead it in hatred of sin and desire of holiness. Catherine hated sin and desired holiness with all her heart and all her mind and all her strength. She followed the road

unflinchingly till she found a better one; then she gave it up to a considerable extent for herself, and wrote of it with much wisdom and insight to help others.

Catherine tortured her body in the belief that she could thereby help to expiate not only her own sins, but the sins of those whom she loved, and of all the world. The charity of her motive did not suffice to save her from the horrible reactions with which the body repays those who torture it. Fra Raimondo wrote that she had "renewed the ancient works of the Fathers of Egypt," and like the Egyptian hermits she suffered, before her three years of seclusion were ended, intolerable anguish from obscene visions which filled her little room with horror, and in one great assault drove her from it to the church. Even there the foul shapes pursued her until she lifted up her heart in the cry: "I have chosen suffering for my consolation and will gladly bear these and all other torments in the name of the Saviour," when at last the horrors disappeared. The words of her cry

were a remembrance of some which had come to her in a vision in which Christ Himself had seemed to encourage her to welcome suffering, for already she had many visions of Christ and at times these were so intimate that it seemed as if He were pacing her little room by her side, reciting the Psalter with her, verse for verse, as one religious would do with another. These happy visions culminated in one on the last day of the Carnival in 1366, when the Lord, in the presence of His Blessed Mother, and of St John, St Paul and St Dominic and the prophet David (playing on his psaltery), espoused her to Himself with a ring in which were inset four pearls encircling a diamond, bidding her, until she celebrated her eternal nuptials with Him in heaven, to preserve it ever without stain. No other human eyes saw that ring, but Catherine told her confessor that it never went from her sight. The vision and the reality with which she invested it form a not very surprising climax to the three years' imitation of the hermits of the desert

by a woman on the way to nineteen. We may set beside them Catherine's belief that a new and constant pain in her side which came to her tortured body at the time of her father's death (1368) was the price she paid to deliver his soul from purgatory. Let it extenuate incredulity that in neither case does that of her critic extend to a doubt that her love fell short of its desire. Rather we should believe that it did indeed bring her into closer union with her Master, and did indeed avail her father's soul in its progress after death; nor was she any less great a saint because she took her loving visions as expressions of literal facts as regards the manner in which her desires were accomplished. In her age and amid her surroundings, how could she do otherwise?

It seems probable that at least some instances of St Catherine's powers of thought-reading, clairvoyance and mental suggestion occurred during the time of her seclusion, and it will be convenient to consider here a few typical cases of them, if only because

powers of the same kind have come to others seemingly as a result of austerities similar to those she had practised, and a like concentration of the will. Primarily such powers seem to belong to a stage of evolution in which language and reason are only imperfectly developed, and to grow weaker and less common as their place is taken by other means of gaining and communicating knowledge and influencing the wills of others. Birds and beasts, and even some insects, certainly possess some measure or adumbration of them; they seem to have played quite a large part in the life of primitive man and to play such a part still in communities which have not advanced far beyond the primitive type. On the other hand, such powers seem to reappear among the highly civilised, as if for work on a new plane, to have been possessed and exercised by holy men of various religions (as well as by some very unspiritual imitators), and to have been undoubtedly possessed and exercised by Christ Himself. In the case of St Catherine

there is good evidence that she did at times know what was passing in the minds of others, have a mental vision of their surroundings and how they were engaged, influence their wills, occasionally almost to the point of coercion, by mental suggestion, and influence their bodies in like manner to the overcoming of disease. She certainly convinced a Fra Bartolommeo di Domenico that she had supernormal (which, of course, he took to be supernatural) means of knowing what he had been doing and saying, and where and with whom. Converted himself, Bartolommeo brought a more stalwart doubter, Fra Lazzarino of Pisa, a lecturer on philosophy and a Franciscan, though no lover of Our Lady Poverty. As he was leaving her room, mildly edified by her conversation, Catherine asked for his prayers, and he by way of spiritual compliment perfunctorily requested her to pray for him. It is a dangerous thing to ask a saint to pray for you, if you don't mean it, and so Fra Lazzarino discovered. The next day he had such an access of tears

that he had difficulty in preparing his lecture and still greater difficulty in delivering it. He was greatly bewildered; but when the tears continued he was at last reminded of his perfunctory request for the young Mantellata's prayers and hastened to her for enlightenment, whereafter followed real contrition, a great giving away of his un-Franciscan acquisitions, and true discipleship of Our Lady Poverty and Catherine.

Another notable case of Catherine's will power was the bringing of the principal members of two Sienese families, the Tolomei and Rinaldini, to the Church of San Cristofaro, there to be reconciled with their enemies, the Maconi. The Tolomei and Rinaldini had made one appointment to negotiate with the Maconi, who had put their cause in the hands of Catherine; but they had deliberately broken their agreement in order to flout both their enemies and their mediator. But a little later on, when no appointment was made, they were drawn, they knew not how, to the Church, and there found the Maconi

and Catherine awaiting them, and recognising the hand of God in their strange leading, submitted to be reconciled.

The most striking and best authenticated instance of Catherine's power over disease is that of Matteo Cenni, rector of the Casa della Misericordia, or Hospital, at Siena, who, when stricken with the plague and despaired of by his friends (including Fra Raimondo, who tells the story), rose up from his bed at her bidding, a hale man, and ate a hearty meal.

The resuscitation of Matteo Cenni happened in 1374, the reconcilement of the Tolomei and Maconi probably in 1376. From 1366, or earlier, to the end of her life the fame of Catherine's supernormal powers and of the efficacy of her prayers which were answered through them seems steadily to have increased. Added to the stories of her austerities and continued abstinence from food, this no doubt largely accounted for the increase in the authority of the dyer's daughter of Siena, whose official position in the Church was

that of an ordinary member of a minor order of the Dominicans. That Catherine herself believed that the powers which she exercised were supernatural goes without saying. Far from being uplifted by the belief, she was more than ever filled with remorse that when God was giving her so much she could do so little for her fellows. More than this: her whole view of life made any kind of self-satisfaction seem to her absurd. When her political activities had begun and she went as a mediator between warring parties to Pisa, she was welcomed by the authorities of the city with a reverence against which some of her disciples thought she should have protested. "I marvel," she replied, "how a creature, knowing itself to be a creature, can have vain glory"; and no one who has any understanding of her can doubt that the reply was utterly genuine, and came from her heart.

While these supernormal powers undoubtedly helped to pave the way for Catherine's public work, and ultimately to enrol her as

one of the officially recognised "saints" of the Catholic Church, at the outset they were an obstacle. The word hysteria may not have been in use at Siena in the fourteenth century, nor was there much knowledge of religious psychology; but a girl newly passed into womanhood who had visions and was said by her friends never to eat or to drink was naturally suspect. The Dominicans, who at first had been gracious to her and had given her a special privilege for the frequent reception of the holy Eucharist,[1] were greatly incensed when she developed a habit, which never left her, of falling, immediately after her communion, into a trance, sometimes of long duration, during which she was completely insensible. They did not want women who went off into trances in their church, and on one occasion threw her out into the blazing Italian sun and left her to come to herself as best she could. Other doubters made trial of her insensibility and she was

[1] The Dominican rule seems to have contemplated reception only fifteen times during the year.

twice (the second time at Avignon in the height of her fame) given wounds which, though she showed no sign of feeling them at the time, subsequently caused her great pain. The Mantellate also were much disturbed, and she was even summoned to Florence by the superiors of her order, to explain what were considered her eccentricities.

Hostile criticism of the kind we have noted was no doubt partly overcome by convincing influential critics of the reality of her powers, but mainly by her daily life. After the Carnival of 1366 she had received what she interpreted as a divine intimation that she was to give up her seclusion and go out to work for God in the world. At first she returned to her father's house, and would gladly have resumed her menial work; but this her family would not allow. Thus set free a second time, she devoted herself partly to the care of the sick and seems to have lighted, probably by her own choice, on more than a usual proportion of those whose

diseases, bodily or mental, exacted the greatest wealth of love from their nurses. There are strange stories of two of those she nursed, one of them a Mantellata, persecuting her with abuse or abominable slanders, while she was devoting herself to their needs. Her patience was so great that it seems to have evoked a morbid desire to test it to the utmost, till it overcame even the morbidity. A third story may show that she herself had not yet wholly escaped from the morbid impulses which had caused her to scald herself at the baths of Vignone and become an all too faithful hermitess of the desert. Finding herself nauseated by the stench from the wound of one of her patients she drank the water in which she had washed it, and was rewarded by a peculiarly comforting vision. If Catherine's eye had offended her spiritually she would certainly have plucked it out. The saints are apt to take these drastic measures with themselves, though seldom with others. St Catherine was especially apt to do so, because her anger at any

weakness she found in herself was united with a belief that only by hatred of herself could she become one with Christ. But she would not have recommended such a draught to anyone else, and (though such punishments have been imposed) she would have been swept with grief if any lover of hers had imposed it on another. She had little regard for her own personality, but for the personality of others she had a constant regard, the outcome of that intellectual chastity which is one of her supreme notes.

Up to 1370, and even later, the varied sources from which Catherine's life is known to us often leave us uncertain as to what she was doing in a particular year and as to the year to which any event should be assigned. We cannot follow her doings during the four years 1366 to 1370 at all closely, but it seems probable that when she was not nursing, or praying, or meditating, much of her time must have been spent in talking and listening to talk. She was a very human woman (it is distressing to have to acknowledge how many

of her small human traits, her love of flowers, for instance, are here being passed over, for lack of skill to find a place to bring them in), and it would be very natural if after her long silence and seclusion she found a pleasure in talking and meeting new people. She must have listened much to have gained the knowledge of the intricate web of public affairs in Italy which enabled her a little later to play her part in them. She must clearly have talked, because she could not yet write, had only learnt to read, by what seemed to her a miracle, during her seclusion, and it was only by talking that she could have made the converts, the friends, who began to gather round her as a little family round its spiritual mother. The friends were both men and women. St Catherine seems never to have been troubled with any touch of the mediæval superconsciousness of sex. Years after her death one of them, Stefano Maconi, then an old monk, prior of his monastery, remembered how when he was first brought to her she welcomed him at once as if he were an old

friend returning after an absence, and made him sit down and tell her all about himself. "She looked everyone in the face, even young men," another reminiscence tells us, and for a religious, whose other habits denoted exceptional austerity, to look straight at a young man, must have been a great surprise in mediæval Siena. Sometimes she may have looked very straight indeed, for some of those who came to her were unwilling penitents, and when in reply to her entreaty that they would go to their priest and confess their sin they suggested that they had confessed quite recently, by her supernormal power she told them the sin which they were keeping back, and they went away penitent to seek absolution. Other visitors, men of learning and dignity, came at times to test her, and went, as Fra Lazzarino had gone, to give their goods to the poor, and begin their spiritual lives anew under her influence. On a Sunday in the autumn of 1370 rumour ran through Siena that she had suddenly died. Fra Bartolommeo heard it when he had just

finished preaching, and hastened to her cell, which he found crowded with her friends, all convinced that she was dead. Catherine herself believed that she did actually die on that Sunday afternoon and come back to life with a new mission, after the four hours' divorce of soul and body, so that it forms a landmark in her career. But the rumour running through the city and the crowd of friends shows that she was already recognised as a missioner, though as yet on a small scale. She was still only in her twenty-fourth year, but her period of preparation had ended. What had it done for her?

Whether with Fra Raimondo, her first biographer (who about this time became her confessor), we regard Catherine's life as an anchoress as ideally good, or think of it as, in itself, almost wholly bad, we are bound to own that it did much for the effectiveness of her work. Her lovers of different temperaments and standpoints may perhaps reach an agreement as to it in the seven words: She was strong enough to stand it. She was not

naturally morbid, not naturally, perhaps, even self-introspective. She viewed her soul objectively, as an instrument for helping to save others, and except for the one sin (as she considered it) of dyeing her hair and dressing prettily when she was fifteen (and this, we may be sure, because it was linked in her mind with her sister's death) she did not worry about her sins as affecting her own salvation. Self-knowledge was one of the two foundations of her religion, but it was always self-knowledge in the light of the love of God, and no one who really believes in the love of God can worry about himself, however deep his repentance. Catherine was so far from worrying that the one thing she wanted was to be sent to hell (with the impossible condition that she was to continue to love God in it) and thereby expiate the sins of others. If we please, we may call that megalomania, but it was very far removed from the morbidity which makes the weak self-introspective soul a misery to itself and to all who have to deal with it. And as

regards the megalomania: is not the faith which can even contemplate the possibility of being able to move a mountain sheer megalomania to all who judge it without recognising that it is based not in self-confidence, but in the knowledge of the love and power of God? This middle-class Sienese woman was soon to tell two Popes and all the great persons of her day their duty, and she was bold to do this, because she believed, not that she herself was a great person, but that God had given her a great mission to carry out. She trained herself to carry out that mission according to the ideas of her day, and pursued these with a relentless thoroughness which at least added to her inborn courage a patience and self-control soon to stand her in good stead. She clothed her visions of God with mediæval colour and imagery and precision of detail, which latter-day critics find hard to accept. That she was mediæval in her methods and outlook helped her in her own day as no anticipation of modern ideas could have done, and should not hinder her

in ours. The important point is that she was strong enough to emerge from her period of preparation with a mind exceptionally sane and well-balanced, with no inclination to overvalue austerities which she had herself practised as a discipline for use by others, and a hold upon the realities of the religious life quite independent of the visions which had accompanied her own progress. Also she had meditated long and deeply and in so doing had laid the foundations of a faith in which her intellect found full play.

# CHAPTER II

## THE BURDEN OF ITALY: AVIGNON

LIKE her vision of four years earlier St Catherine's "mystical death" in 1370 sent her back into the world convinced that she had received a wider mission. The number of her penitents, both "religious" and lay, increased, and among them and the men and women already working in the same spirit not a few became more or less formally her disciples. After eighteen months of quiet work of this kind we find her, early in 1372, taking the burden of Italy upon her shoulders and writing two letters of exhortation to Cardinal d'Estaing, then newly appointed Papal Legate and governor of Bologna, an office which tasked him with carrying on the Pope's war with Bernabo Visconti, lord of Milan.

The burden of Italy in 1372 was heavy

beyond conception. In one set of cities and states the inhabitants existed to be fleeced by the representatives of a French Pope living at Avignon, surrounded by kinsmen and courtiers eager to make Italy their prey; in another they were at the mercy of despots, of whom the Visconti of Milan were the most restless and the worst; in a third the nobles and middle-class workers and traders were ever conspiring against each other to put the community beneath the heel of their faction, while the unskilled workers hated them both. Cities and states of all three classes were constantly at war, one with another, or in a succession of leagues. To increase their power they hired fighting-men from other countries, and these passed from one pay-master to another, with no thought save as to which would give the highest wage, and the best chance of sacking a town. When no one was employing them these free-lances moved about, blackmailing cities and plundering the country wherever they went, so that the folk from the neighbouring farms must

needs seek comparative safety behind the walls with which every little hill-town was ringed.

In this general insecurity the sin which flourished more than any other and seemed to infect all classes alike was cruelty. The strong were cruel in their pursuit of power and gain and pleasure; the weak were cruel with the horrible cruelty of cowardice; even those who sought after justice and peace were cruel in the punishments with which they tried to deter their opponents. If Bernabo Visconti hanged or blinded those who interfered with his hunting and burnt the friars who reproved him, the Florentines flayed alive a monk suspected of treachery, and at Siena the flesh of conspirators was torn off with hot pincers before they were allowed to die. Catherine had been cruel to herself in her penances, but for all the ills of Italy her one remedy was love, and she preached it unceasingly to all whom she could reach.

Cardinal d'Estaing, to whom her first public

letters were addressed, belonged to the better type of ecclesiastics. He was a stern ruler, but honest and zealous to do right. To this prince of the Church the dyer's daughter of Siena wrote bidding him lay aside all self-love and the servile fear which makes men afraid to do justice lest they should lose by it, and carry out his charge with the same fervent charity which (and not the nails) kept God-and-Man fastened upon the cross. The Holy Father himself must be inflamed with this charity, so that he may consider the loss of souls more than of cities; for it is souls, not cities, that God demands.

Whether d'Estaing answered these letters is not known, but it is probable that he was impressed by them, since a year later the Pope's nephew, Gérard du Puy, to whose cruel mercies had recently been entrusted the government of Perugia, sought out Catherine by his uncle's orders, and it was most likely through a report by d'Estaing that Gregory had heard of her. Du Puy's communication appears to have been general

in character, and Catherine's answer is concerned with reforms, dwelling on the need of the Church "to be pulled down even to the foundation," so that it might be utterly reformed, reproaching the Pope with his nepotism and tolerance of the sins of the clergy, and bidding Du Puy, of all men, to help in removing the "wolves and incarnate demons," all whose thoughts are of fine palaces, gluttony and harlots. Gregory, however, may have had a specific object in the mission of Du Puy to Catherine which brought down on him these exhortations. In her second letter to d'Estaing she had alluded to the duty of all Christians to prepare for war against the infidels, and early in 1373 the Pope had proclaimed a crusade against the Turks for which popular support was essential. If he guessed that in Catherine he would find a useful instrument he was right. Her political horizon was limited; her own order of the Mantellate had been founded by St Dominic for the wives and widows of the men who fought in his crusade

against the Albigenses, and she took a crusade at its face value, as an opportunity to die for Christ. The Pope's project filled her with enthusiasm, and a little later on she worked hard for it.

Meanwhile, in November, 1373, an ambassador of Bernabo Visconti, who was trying to engage Siena on the side of Milan against the Pope, also sought out Catherine, and provoked the letter to his lord in which she tramples on any pretence Bernabo may have made to be acting as a divinely appointed scourge of the Church. Catherine's twin doctrines as a diplomatist were already fully formulated. It was the Pope's duty to punish the evil ministers of Christ's blood, the Pope's sin if he failed to do so; but if the Vicar of Christ failed, only God Himself could rightly punish these ministers; any layman who tried to do so thereby cut himself off from the body of Holy Church.

We have a further proof of Catherine's growing importance in her summons to a chapter-general of the Dominicans held at

Florence in May, 1374, an incident only known from the record of an anonymous chronicler who tells us that she was there "deemed to be a great servant of God." When she returned home at the end of June she found the plague, which had already broken out in Florence, raging much more furiously at Siena, and in spite of her fearless ministrations two of her brothers, a sister and eight nephews died of it. Catherine worked on devotedly in the stricken city, and it was at this time that Matteo Cenni, rector of the Casa della Misericordia, the headquarters of Sienese philanthropy, as already narrated, rose up at her bidding a hale man from what had seemed his death-bed. Another fighter of the plague, Fra Raimondo delle Vigne, a Dominican of great reputation, believed that she had miraculously restored him also to health and now became her confessor, and before long her disciple also, and eventually her first biographer. Catherine, as he tells us, had endured much from her earlier directors; Fra Tommaso,

his immediate predecessor, had done better for her, but Raimondo gave her more support than she had ever received before, and she welcomed it as a special gift from Mary.

In the middle of August Catherine herself was dangerously ill, and went for her convalescence to a Dominican convent at Montepulciano of which Fra Raimondo had been director, and written the life of Santa Agnese, its patroness. For St Agnese Catherine had conceived a great devotion, and in connection with her visits to the body of the saint Raimondo records two miracles, which, if we can trust him, are both excellently authenticated and both very difficult to believe.[1]

Before the end of 1374 the Pope communicated again with Catherine by another emissary whose personality has some significance. As a religious intervener in papal

[1] On one occasion, he tells us, one of the feet of St Agnes raised itself to meet the lips of St Catherine as she bent to kiss it; on the other the body of the saint was covered with grains of white, as by a fall of manna.

and Italian statecraft the dyer's daughter of Siena had been preceded by the Swedish princess Birgitta (or St Bridget) who had come to Rome in 1349 (five years after the death of her husband), and for nearly a quarter of a century laboured continually for the reform of the Church, striving to convert successive Popes with visions and prophecies. The Popes seem to have kept out of her way as much as they could, and though she was allowed to found her order, the impression she leaves is of a pathetic and (politically) rather futile figure. But if she could not convert the Popes she made them uneasy, and after her death, in June, 1373, her director, Alfonso da Vadaterra, who under her influence had resigned his bishopric to become a hermit, had been staying with Gregory at Avignon. It was he who now brought to Catherine the Pope's blessing, and the "indulgence" promised to those who helped the crusade. The Pope's choice of St Bridget's director as his messenger suggests a further recognition of Catherine's spiritual influence in the Church.

Catherine welcomed Gregory's message as a proof that "the Holy Father has begun to attend to the honour of God and of Holy Church." The Pope's motives were probably more complex than she imagined. A crusade was no longer an attempt to rescue the keeping of the Holy Places from the Turk, a task reserved for our own day. It might be looked on as a real League of Nations against a ruthless power whose menace to Christendom continued to grow for another two centuries, and both in its rise and fall brought misery wherever it spread. On a narrower view a crusade would at least deliver Italy from the free-lances and divert other powers from attacking the papal possessions. Whatever his motive, Gregory had already launched his summons to Christendom, and St Bridget, who probably knew too well how little the spirit of Christ had been present in earlier crusades, had denounced it. Now a successor to Bridget had arisen whose simple-hearted enthusiasm for the crusade was already known. In the

spiritual bankruptcy of the papacy Gregory hastened to secure her aid. If his motives were mixed the lower side of his character paid the penalty, for by seeking out Catherine he brought an influence into his own life greater than any it had known, and so was spurred to an enterprise which his half-heartedness speedily wrecked.

Catherine worked for the crusade in letters to high and low, including the dissolute Queen Giovanna of Naples and Sir John Hawkwood, the famous free-lance. The letters must have been dictated mainly at Pisa, whither she had gone by invitation early in 1375 on a spiritual mission to its citizens. Two of her followers had paved the way for her, and the head of the republic, Piero Gambacorti, one of the finest men of his day, had pressed her to come. She thus received both a popular and an official welcome, and her acceptance of it caused serious misgivings among the devout. To Catherine, whose whole creed was based on the denial of self, even of her existence as compared with the

reality of the existence of God, the idea that "a creature knowing itself to be a creature can have vainglory" seemed (as we have already noted) ridiculous; but when a correspondent (identified by Mr Gardner with the poet-anchorite, Bianco dall' Anciolina) remonstrated with her bitterly in verse and prose, and revived the old story that her inability to eat was a pretence, she answered him humbly that she well knew that the devil went about to deceive her, and begged Bianco's prayers, more particularly that God would enable her to eat like others, if it were His will, as it was hers. Nor was there any protest against his attack save in the quiet words: "And I beseech you, too, not to be hasty in judging, unless you are quite sure that you see things as they are in God's sight."

It was while at Pisa, at Mid-Lent in 1375, in the Church of Santa Cristina, that Catherine according to her own belief received the stigmata, marks as of the nails which pierced Christ's hands and feet on the cross. Her confessor, Fra Raimondo, who had given

her the Holy Communion, watching her prostrate in one of her usual trances after receiving it, saw her little by little rise to her knees, her face radiant, her arms outstretched, and when she had stayed long in that position, suddenly fall back as if mortally wounded. Her friends thought that she was dying, and that it was a second miracle when in answer to their prayers she rallied, and fully recovered her strength the next Sunday, when she again received the sacrament. That no marks were visible they believed to be due to Catherine's own prayer. It seems more likely that once again, as at the time when she believed that Christ placed an invisible ring on her finger, a trance experience was so vivid to her that she could not distinguish it from reality.[1] Only a few weeks earlier she had written to Bianco:

[1] The stigmatisation of St Catherine is on an altogether different plane from that of St Francis, which, however it may be explained, seems to have been evidenced by real wounds. It should be noted that before this experience at Pisa she believed that a stigma had already been given her in her right hand.

"I fear ever because of my own frailty, and because of the astuteness of the devil, thinking that I may be deceived; for I know and see that the devil lost blessedness, but not wisdom, and with that wisdom, or rather astuteness, he could deceive me. But I turn, then, and cling to the tree of the most holy cross of Christ crucified and thereto I would be fastened; and I doubt not that, if I be fastened and nailed to it with Him through love and through deep humility, the devils will have no power against me, not because of my virtue, but by the virtue of Christ crucified."

That Catherine credited her visions with an objective reality which they did not in fact possess might so clearly have been her spiritual undoing that (if we are to believe in diabolic agency) we might well ascribe them to the devil's astuteness. If it were so, the astuteness was thrown away. All the spiritual gifts, all the spiritual favours which she believed herself to have received, only

increased her sense of her own nothingness, her own unprofitableness as a servant to whom God had entrusted so much and who could do so little in return. Her ecstatic illusions, as this lover of her holds them, may be naturally explained as resulting from her treatment of her body; but if the devil had a hand in them he might well curse her, as she believed he did,[1] for never giving him a chance.

The crusade for which Catherine worked so hard during her stay at Pisa came to nothing. In Italy (and not only in Italy) the Christian powers suspected each other too deeply for common action. While Catherine was still at Pisa the grievances of the Florentines against the Pope came to a head. In the previous June Gregory had

[1] *Della Dottrina*, lxvi.: "A curse on you, for I can find no device to deal with you. If I plunge you in the depth by confusing your mind, you lift yourself to the heights of mercy. And if I exalt you on high, you abase yourself to the depths of hell by humility and harry me in hell itself. I will have no more to do with you, for you beat me with love as with a bludgeon."

made a truce with Bernabo Visconti, and the Papal Legate (Cardinal de Noellet, who had succeeded d'Estaing) dismissed Hawkwood and his mercenaries. He now demanded a large loan from the Florentines to enable him to re-engage Hawkwood in order to keep him out of mischief. When the loan was refused Hawkwood approached the Florentine border, and on 21st June had to be bought off with double the money. Pisa and Siena were treated in the same way, and all three cities retaliated by raising a large part of their ransom by additional taxes on the clergy. Meanwhile Gérard du Puy's actions at Perugia had filled the Florentines with fear for their liberties, and rumours of papal plots ran through the city. A Florentine ambassador was arrested at Perugia and a Papal Nuncio at Florence.

As they drifted into war each party sought to secure the help, or at least the neutrality, of the other cities of Tuscany. Catherine's work for the crusade had convinced the Pope of her usefulness and she was now bidden to

go to Lucca in his interests, thence returning to Pisa, where her influence was great. For a while she held both cities neutral, though her own Siena made a treaty with Florence. Then in December came a great uprising of the cities in the States of the Church against the tyranny of the papal officials, and in the same month by creating seven French cardinals, of whom one was the hated Gérard du Puy, the oppressor of Perugia, Gregory showed himself obstinate in his ill-doing. If he had been as other temporal princes in Italy his cause would have been hopeless; but while his enemies were capturing his cities and gaining over Pisa and Lucca he summoned all the Florentines who had held office since the previous June (1375) to appear before him at Avignon, and the summons clearly preluded a full use of his ecclesiastical power. Catherine wrote to him pleadingly and unflinchingly: pleadingly, that he would win back the rebels by love; unflinchingly in her clear statement of facts as to the wickedness of the papal officials

and the ruin caused by his own bad appointments. Unhappily Gregory was too weak, too much under the influence of those around him, to do either mercy or justice.

During the spring of 1376 events moved quickly, too quickly perhaps to please the Florentines. On 20th March Bologna, incited by their emissaries, rose against the Pope, and though eight days later Hawkwood's mercenaries sacked Faenza on the plea of forestalling a similar revolt, the atrocities they committed stiffened Italian feeling. On the other hand, rumours of a papal crusade against Florentine commerce daily gathered strength, and to keep a door open for peace they persuaded Fra Raimondo, to whom, as Catherine's director, Gregory would be likely to listen, to go to Avignon in their interest. Raimondo had barely started, however, when the Pope, despite the impassioned appeal of the Florentine ambassadors to the figure of the Crucified which hung in the great hall of Avignon, placed Florence under an interdict. Raimondo had taken with him a letter from

Catherine ; now a vision came to her in which Christ laid a cross upon her neck and put an olive into her hand, bidding her offer them to both the combatants, and in obedience to this vision she proposed herself to the Florentines as a mediator.

The text of the letter in which Catherine offered her services to Florence has come down to us and is quite explicit. Neither now, nor at any time, did she swerve by a hair's-breadth from the simple doctrine which she had expounded to Bernabo Visconti. Nothing in her eyes could excuse revolt against the Vicar of Christ, but she believed unfalteringly that if the Florentines submitted to Christ's Vicar Christ would inspire him to become a loving father to them and give them a good peace. It is humanly probable, from what we know of Gregory's character and the power which Catherine gained over him, that the Florentines would have done well to accept her mediation whole-heartedly. But it was much to ask of the leaders of a revolt against cruel oppression, and from the

point of view alike of safety and dignity, her offer was too full of risks to commend itself for sincere adoption to business men and officials. On the other hand straightforward rejection would have thrown away such help as might be gained from her advocacy and have been a false move in a contest in which religious opinion counted for much. A middle course seems to have been taken, pettily astute, by no means straightforward. There was a War Cabinet in Florence, an "Eight of War," but for other matters the ordinary government of the republic, which according to its jealous custom passed into new hands every two months, remained in force. These civil governors received Catherine with all honour, acquiesced in all she proposed, and sent her on to Avignon in the belief that she had full powers, which would be confirmed by special envoys who would speedily follow her. But nothing was put in writing, no entries were made in the city records; and, the Eight of War, though doubtless cognisant of all that was done and conversing with her

individually, seem to have held no official communication with her of any kind. Thus Catherine's help was secured, while their own hands remained free—a mean arrangement, doubtless, but we must remember that in a state of society in which belief in the possibility of inspiration was fairly general politicians had to make shifts to escape from difficulties to which those of our own day are not exposed.

On the evidence which has come down to us Gregory's dealings with Catherine as to Florence contrast very favourably with those of the Republic itself. She arrived at Avignon on 18th June, and two days later was received in private audience by the Pope. Fra Raimondo acted as interpreter, and we have his solemn witness, "before God and men," that to prove to Catherine his desire for peace Gregory told her that he "placed it absolutely in her hands," only bidding her "to have at heart the honour of the Church." It is probable that in taking this risk he was inspired by Catherine's personality to think

for once "of souls rather than cities"; but if he paused to estimate the risk politically he had more than enough statecraft to be able to recognise that it was small. If the Florentines had trusted Catherine further than as an advocate likely to modify the "atmosphere" of the papal court in their favour, they would not have sent her to Avignon unaccredited. Whatever Gregory's motive, he satisfied Catherine that all was well on his side, and had the kindly thought to assign her an excellent house with a chapel in it, and provide for the maintenance there of herself and her *famiglia*, the not inconsiderable company of men and women who travelled with her, as long as she stayed in Avignon.

Catherine had been led to believe that new ambassadors from Florence would join her at once. Days passed and none arrived. "Believe me, Catherine," Raimondo represents the Pope as saying to her, "they have deceived you and will deceive you: they will send no mission, or if they do send, its instructions

will be such that it will come to nothing." For eight days Catherine waited, then she wrote to the Eight of War. The letter begins with a summons to true grief for the wrong they had done by their revolt. They are bidden to ask for life as sons who had been as dead, and assured that God's goodness will give it them if they really humble themselves and recognise their faults. If, as rumour reports, they have imposed new taxes on the clergy they have wronged God and come near to ruining the hope of peace. If they hinder the grace of the Holy Spirit, they will put Catherine herself to great shame and reproach, for what save shame and confusion can result if she tells the Holy Father one thing and they do another? And then she gives the story of her interview with the Pope and tells them how he listened to her graciously, showing his desire for peace, like a good father who thinks not so much of the wrong his son has done to him as whether he has become humble and so can be fully pardoned. At the end of the conversation

the Pope had told her that if her account of the Florentines was true he was ready to receive them as his children and to do what she should think right. He could not say more till their ambassadors arrived. "I marvel," she ends, "that they are not yet come. When they arrive I shall meet them and then go to the Holy Father, and will write to you how the business proceeds. But you with your taxes and changes are spoiling the seeds I sow. Do so no more, for the love of Christ crucified and your own profit."

Such a letter addressed to a War Cabinet strikes strangely on modern ears. If it arrived before the mission started (on or about 7th July) the "Eight" must have resolved to ignore it and so perhaps gave the three ambassadors their cue. On or a little before 17th July they were at last at Avignon. At her summons they came to see her. Fra Raimondo was present at the interview, and we have his account of it. Catherine reminded them of the promises she had received

from the "priors and governors" of the city, and told them how the Pope had put the peace in her hands, and they could therefore have a good peace if they wished it. "But they, like deaf adders, closed their ears to the sound of peace and answered that they had no commission of any sort to deal with her, nor to do the things which she told them."

As far as the Florentines could do so they had brought upon Catherine the shame and confusion which she had written to them would result if by their acts they repudiated her. No shame nor confusion ensued. She continued, Raimondo tells us, to plead their cause, and two cardinals (one of them Pierre d' Estaing) were commissioned to treat with the ambassadors, negotiations which led to no result. Her influence with the Pope seems to have increased now that she was no longer directly the spokeswoman of the rebellious city. In a visit she paid to the wife of Louis of Anjou at Villeneuve she inflamed the Duke with a great ardour

for the crusade. Attempts to entangle her in her talk at Avignon only led to the conversion of some of her adversaries. Yet the fact remains that her proffered mediation had wholly failed.

# CHAPTER III

## THE BURDEN OF ITALY: THE RETURN OF THE POPE AND PEACE WITH FLORENCE

ST CATHERINE had come to Avignon to make peace between the Pope and Florence. When the Florentines refused her mediation she stayed on to be the deciding factor in bringing the Pope back from Avignon to Rome. Since 1305, save for Urban V.'s three years' visit to Italy (1367-1370), the Popes had lived in luxury at Avignon under French protection, and had enforced to the utmost their temporal rights in the States of the Church only to win tribute for themselves and place their favourites in offices which they mostly abused. A Pope as bad as Clement VI. would have occasioned no less scandal at Rome than at Avignon, but Avignon became a plague spot in the eyes of all reformers and return to Rome was looked

on as the necessary beginning of any cleansing of the Church. Gregory XI. himself had played with this idea since before he was Pope. He is even said to have taken a secret vow that he would return. But he was a Frenchman (a de Beaufort), surrounded with French relations and French cardinals, and ill-health made him shrink from facing the desolation of Rome and the task of dealing with the troubles of Italy at close quarters. Catherine, like Bridget before her, had urged his return from her first communication with him. Since she came to Avignon she had been able to urge it personally, and by the time the Florentine envoys arrived Gregory had already begun to make preparations for departure. Henceforth Catherine was his main inspiration in carrying out this policy, which, save for d'Estaing, found no support among the cardinals.

During the six weeks or so which followed her brief visit to the Duchess of Anjou at Villeneuve Catherine had, at most, only a

single audience with the Pope. Though she hated astuteness (the devil's substitute for wisdom) she had enough of it to be sure that the best chance of getting Gregory to leave Avignon lay in lulling the alarm of the French party and then persuading him to swift action. The Pope, on his part, knew that to summon her would quicken opposition, but at least three times he consulted her by letter or message. Once it was to ask how he could be right in rejecting the advice of the great majority of his cardinals, a second time to inquire anxiously whether she saw no obstacle to his journey, a third to lay before her a letter (probably forged) from a pretended well-willer who, while applauding his project, played on his fears of assassination. In each case Catherine had her answer ready. Assurance had come to her in a trance that, contrary to his wont, the more Gregory was opposed in this matter the more he would feel such a strength increasing in him as no man could take from him, and her faith helped her to bring the prophecy

to pass. So she bade him play his part *virilmente*, casting aside all servile fear, since for fear, save of God, there was no need, while she denounced the warning letter, as not written by its reputed author, but forged by the servants of the devil at the papal court.

On 13th September 1376, some eight weeks after Catherine's rebuff by the Florentine ambassadors, Gregory started on the first stage of the long journey from Avignon to Rome. According to a story confusedly told, his father, the old Count de Beaufort, threw himself prostrate before him to prevent his departure, and with the singularly unapt quotation: "Thou shalt trample upon the asp and the basilisk" the Pope stepped over him. A stronger man would have shown more love, but love was just what Gregory lacked, and because he lacked it the courageous return to Rome, to which Catherine had inspired him, brought no good to himself and only aggravated, at least for a time, the ills of the Church.

Catherine started from Avignon on the same day as the Pope, but being encumbered with no state and only her *famiglia* as retinue, reached Genoa long before him. When he arrived there on 18th October, after a tempestuous voyage from Marseilles, he was so disheartened that we are told by Fra Tommaso Caffarini, one of Catherine's disciples, that he visited her in disguise, and drew from her enough strength to keep him on his way. Leaving Genoa on 29th October he landed at Corneto, in the Papal States, on 5th December and, after receiving from the Romans an offer of the "full dominion" of the city, made his triumphal entry on 17th January 1377. Catherine, meanwhile, after being detained at Genoa by illness among her followers, had reached Siena some time in December, and wrote Gregory a letter of encouragement while he was lingering at Corneto. About the same time she replied to the request of a party among the Florentines for an account of what she had done at Avignon by permitting one of

the best-loved of her followers, Stefano Maconi, to go to Florence, where he interviewed the "Eight of War" and was almost murdered by a Pope-hating mob. She herself pleaded with Gregory in letter after letter, beseeching him to subdue his rebellious subjects by love and show more care for the souls committed to him than for the estates of the Church. Deaf to her appeals he would yield nothing and only offered the Florentines extortionate and humiliating terms of peace. On 3rd February a frightful massacre at Cesena, ordered by Cardinal Robert of Geneva, sent a thrill of horror through Italy without eliciting any repudiation from the Pope. Well might Catherine write, in bitterness of soul: "It seems that the devil has taken the lordship of the world, not by his own power, for he can do nothing, but by our gift."

According to Mr Gardner it was probably in the first half of this year (1377) that Catherine reconciled to death a young noble, Niccolò di Toldo, condemned, it is usually

said, for a few thoughtless words against the government of the state, though possibly he had really joined in a conspiracy against it. This is the account of what she did for him from her letter to Fra Raimondo:

"I went to visit him of whom you know, whereby he received so great comfort and consolation that he confessed and disposed himself very well; and he made me promise by the love of God that when the time came I would be with him; and so I promised and did. Then in the morning before the bell tolled I went to him and he received great consolation. I led him to hear Mass, and he received the Holy Communion, which he had never received since his first. His will was conformed and submitted to the will of God, and only a fear was left of not being strong at the moment. But the measureless and glowing goodness of God beguiled him, endowing him with so great affection and love in the desire of God that he could not be without Him, and he said to me: 'Be with

me and do not abandon me, so shall I be not otherwise than well, and die content'; and he leaned his head on my breast. Then I felt a tumult of joy and an odour of his blood, and my own also, which I desire to shed for the sweet Bridegroom Jesus. And as the desire of my soul waxed and I felt his fear, I said: 'Comfort thee, sweet my brother, for we shall soon come to the nuptials; thou wilt go to them bathed in the sweet blood of the Son of God, with the sweet name of Jesus (may it never leave thy memory), and I wait for thee at the place of justice.' Then his heart lost all fear (think of it, Father), and his face changed from sadness to joy, and he rejoiced, he exulted, and said: 'Whence comes so great grace to me that the sweetness of my soul will await me at the holy place of justice?' See, he had come to so much light that he called the place of justice holy! And he said: 'I shall go all joyous and strong, and it will seem to me a thousand years before I come there, when I think that you are waiting for

me.' And he spoke so sweetly of the goodness of God, that one could scarcely bear it.

"I waited for him at the place of justice, waiting with continual prayer and the presence of Mary and of Catherine, Virgin and Martyr. Before he arrived, I lay down and stretched my neck upon the block; but there came nothing, for I was full of love of myself. Then up! I prayed, I constrained, and cried to Mary that I would this grace that she should give him light and peace of heart at that moment, and then that I should see him reach his goal. Then my soul was so full that although a crowd was there I could not see a creature, for the sweet promise made to me.

"Then he came like a meek lamb; and seeing me he began to laugh, and would have me make the sign of the cross. When he had received the sign, I said: 'Down! To the bridal, sweet my brother! soon shalt thou be in everlasting life.' He lay down with great meekness, and I stretched out his neck, and bent over him, and called to his mind the Blood of the Lamb. His lips said

nought but 'Jesus' and 'Catherine'; and as he spoke I received his head in my hands, closing my eyes in the Divine Goodness, and saying: 'I will.'"

With her eyes thus closed to the horror in front of her and her will identified with God's, Catherine saw the soul of the dead man borne into the flame of the Divine love, and received into the wounded side of Christ. As he entered that refuge he seemed to her to look back, as a bride, ere she enters her husband's house, turns back to look gratefully on those who have borne her company on her way. "I remained on earth," she wrote, "with the greatest envy."

. . . . .

For the last five months of 1377 Catherine was in the country outside Siena, mostly at the Rocca d'Orcia, a castle belonging to the powerful Sienese family, the Salimbeni, to make peace between two of its members having been the first object of her expedition. But the country folk when they found her

amongst them came from all sides to listen to her, and many were healed in body and mind as well as in soul. To answer to these appeals for help and continue her work as a peacemaker Catherine stayed on at the Rocca month after month till the ruling party at Siena became suspicious that she might be plotting with their enemies, and sent remonstrances to her, which she answered with some indignation. Meanwhile she learnt to write for herself, and took a pleasure in her new accomplishment (it seemed to her miraculous), which helped her to bear the absence at Rome of her beloved confessor, Fra Raimondo, and also the anger of the Pope, who resented strongly certain proposals of hers with which Raimondo had been charged. Catherine was always ready to believe that any failure was the result of some fault in herself, and she answered humbly through Raimondo, asking forgiveness, though she did not swerve one jot from her old message that if Gregory would overcome his enemies he must do so by love, and

love alone. The Pope was quickly pacified and influenced perhaps by some information as to the state of affairs at Florence which Raimondo had obtained from a partisan source, determined to use Catherine as an agent on his side to bring about a peace for which both sides were now sincerely anxious.

The Pope had weighted the scales heavily against the Florentines by backing his temporal warfare with a religious interdict which they had at first scrupulously obeyed. Florence had now forced its priests to resume their ministrations, and there was a danger that the spiritual weapon thus used for political ends might break in its wielder's hands. The expense of the war, moreover, had emptied the papal treasury, and at the same time it was becoming clear that the longer it lasted the less the Florentines would be able to pay. Gregory had thus very strong reasons for hastening peace and he seems to have used Catherine little more scrupulously than the Florentines had used her some months before. She was not

dispatched this time without credentials, but her real mission was to the heads of a faction in the city, not to the State itself.

In the desire, seldom for long realised, to prevent revolutions and internal strife almost every free city in Italy had devised some ingenious check on its ruling party. In Florence one of these checks took the form of a right vested in the chiefs of the Guelph faction, who had little direct power in the State, to "admonish" any peculiarly obnoxious opponent and thereby exclude him from office. The right was essentially one to be sparingly used, but the idea which underlay Catherine's mission was that the men of importance in the war party at Florence were very few and that if these could be removed peace might easily be arranged. An emissary of the Pope by entering the city to encourage the Guelphs to embark on such a policy ran very great risks, and for this reason Gregory had refused to send Fra Raimondo. Catherine, he hoped, would be protected from violence by her sex and the

reverence in which she was held. To her danger was an attraction, and she obediently proceeded to Florence, where she found many friends. Introduced to the heads of the Guelph faction, she told them unhesitatingly that anyone in Florence who was hindering peace between the Holy Father and his children deserved to be deprived of office as a destroyer rather than a governor of the commonwealth. Her consistent denial of the right of laymen to punish priestly ill-doing made this the only advice she could give and fully justified her in giving it. But the Guelph leaders used her prestige for their own ends as unscrupulously as the Pope. Hailing her as a prophetess they "admonished" opponent after opponent with every appearance of party and personal spite, till they precipitated a double revolution and gravely imperilled the cause of peace which other events were helping to forward.

Early in March, 1378, a peace conference had met at Sarzana, and negotiations were going well when it was dissolved by the news

that Gregory had died on 27th March. When a new Pope was elected on 8th April the Florentines sent an embassy to congratulate him, and though the change involved delay it was really favourable to peace, since it removed the personal obstacle which the weak obstinacy of Gregory's character had introduced. Another obstacle was removed by the Florentines, in order to put themselves right with the new Pope, resuming their obedience to the interdict. Catherine was largely instrumental in bringing this about, and thus rendered a real service to the cause of peace. But all through April and May the Guelph leaders continued their "admonitions," and at last, on 22nd June, the popular party rose in revolt, and while the measures of the Guelphs were hastily reversed the houses of their leaders were looted and burnt. A month later a second revolution, in which the unskilled workers rose against both the rival political parties alike, still further endangered the existence of the State.

By the mission on which Gregory had sent

her Catherine had been linked with the party of the Guelphs, who had acclaimed her as a prophetess. She had urged moderation on their leaders, but it was the papal policy which had launched them on their career of "admonishing," and this policy she had presented as her own. Those who revolted against it were sure that she must be a bad woman, and because they had previously believed her to be holy, they called her a hypocrite. After the houses of the Guelph leaders had been burnt, on 22nd June, news came to that in which she was lodging that an armed mob was on its way to kill her. Fearful for their own safety her hosts begged her to go, and she went with one or two of her company to a neighbouring garden, and there awaited the mob in prayer. They came with cries against the "wicked woman" and Catherine (it was the only really selfish thing she ever did, for she was encouraging them to commit murder), with great cheerfulness prepared herself for martyrdom. Facing a rioter who was brandishing a sword

and crying louder than the rest: "Where is Catherine?" she placed herself on her knees before him so that he could conveniently strike off her head and joyously bade him do anything which God would let him to herself, but not to touch her friends. The sword-brandisher first feebly bade her go away, and when she renewed her exhortations himself fled in confusion, taking his fellow-rioters with him. Catherine's brief moment of utter joy was thus quickly ended, and she wept bitterly with the disappointment. "The Eternal Bridegroom played a great trick on me," she wrote to Fra Raimondo, and was convinced that it was for her sins that she was considered unworthy of martyrdom. Her friends wished to hurry her back to Siena, but she steadfastly refused to leave what she regarded as her post until peace was concluded, and stayed near or in Florence through the month which, to those less anxious for martyrdom, was full of doubts and fears, and culminated in the second revolt, that of the unskilled workers.

At last, on 28th July, peace was concluded, on terms far easier and more honourable to Florence than had previously been offered, and then Catherine felt free to return home. She had stayed faithfully at her post to the very end, but it is not possible to maintain that the peace was of her making.

# CHAPTER IV

## ST CATHERINE'S BOOK

IT was at the moment in her career to which we have now come, when she was resting in the summer of 1378, after returning from Florence, that Catherine composed a long treatise, the *Libro della Divina Dottrina*, often called, from the expressed subject of one of its sections, and its form and underlying intention, *Dialogo della Divina Providentia*. The full title of the book, as given in the oldest extant manuscript,[1] may be translated: "The Book of Divine Doctrine given by the person of God the Father speaking to the intellect of the glorious and holy virgin Catherine of Siena of the order of Preachers, written as she dictated it in the vulgar tongue,

[1] Siena MS., T. ii. 9, printed in 1912 under the editorship of Matilde Fiorilli as part of the series Scrittori d'Italia (Bari, Gius. Laterza & Figli).

abiding in rapture at the time, and listening what the Lord God should speak within her and rehearsing it before many." The "many" here mentioned were, or included, Catherine's secretaries, one of whom, a Sienese notary, Ser Cristofano di Gano Guidini, says even more explicity that she was in abstraction (*astrazione*) when she made the book, without any sensation save the power of speech, "and God the Father spoke in her, and she answered and asked, and she herself recited the words of God the Father spoken to her, and also her own words which she spoke to Him in her asking." The other secretaries who wrote from Catherine's dictation were Barduccio Canigiani, Neri Pagliaresi and Stefano Maconi, and the last of these, in his evidence in the "process" which procured the preliminary recognition of her sanctity, told how he had written down part of it as she "with her virgin mouth" dictated it "*mirabili modo*."

The manner in which the book came into being thus assuredly appeared miraculous to

Catherine's secretaries, and we should not doubt that it appeared miraculous also to the saint herself. To students of our own day the fact that the discourses were delivered under trance conditions gives them no higher claim to acceptance. Apparently Catherine was accustomed to meditate in dialogue, and when she trusted her subconscious self to work out in words the problems over which she had agonised during the three years of heroic diplomacy from which she was now taking a brief rest, the form of her meditations become the form of her book—not (though probably in no other way could she have written it) to its advantage. From Hebrew prophets to the latest tract-writer those who would convey to others the thoughts as to the character and will of God which well up within them when the mind is stilled to receive the Divine influence have been too ready to prefix the name of God to their own message, and of this unconscious confusion between the energy rightly recognised as God-sent and its entirely human expression

the *Libro della Dottrina* is a striking instance. Sensitive readers will feel at every turn that the long discourses which are put into the mouth of God are really translations from the third person to the first, Catherine's ardent thoughts about God converted into God's lectures to her about Himself and His dealings with men. In the process the fiery passion of her love and adoration is at times transmuted into something akin to human self-satisfaction, a poor version, we may be sure, of that self-contemplation which some theologians have pictured as the chief work of God. And even not very sensitive readers must be affronted when thoughts not worthy of Catherine herself, confusions, pedantries, ideas from an altogether lower plane than that which she had reached, are attributed to God.[1] The way in which she delivered her

[1] The confusions, doubtless due to trance conditions, are mainly cases of too rapid transitions from one metaphor or vision to another. As an example of a pedantry (of a kind in which the sermons and commentaries of her day abound) we may take the interpretation of the splendid promise: "Where two or three are gathered in my name I will be in

message forbade revision. There is dross mixed with the gold, but the gold is there, and it is worth all the patience and intellectual effort needed to make it our own.

To this difficulty, for which Catherine herself was responsible, the copyists, translators and editors of her book have added another, which makes it seem much more formless and confused than the trance conditions under which it was dictated really left it. The oldest manuscript was finally divided into one hundred and sixty-seven chapters, but the ornamental capitals show that at an earlier stage it had only one hundred and one, and originally it is clear

the midst of them," not literally of the Divine presence which is felt in human fellowship, but metaphorically of the gift of it when the three powers of the soul, Memory, Intellect and Will, are knit together in worship. Of ideas from a lower plane the worst is the statement, as to men not in a state of grace who do good works, that sometimes God rewards them in things temporal "treating them as an animal which is fattened for slaughter" ("a questi cotali l'è remunerato in cose temporali, facendo di loro come de l'animale che s'ingrassa per menarlo al macello").—Cap. 46.

that the book had none at all, but ran on in much larger sections. Unfortunately the later of the two chapter-dividers marked the beginning of certain portions which he especially admired, as *Trattato della Discrezione*, *della Orazione*, *della Providenzia*, and *dell'Obbedienza*, and these notes have been taken as the basis of a division into four, or sometimes five or six books, which is quite misleading.[1] Of all this Catherine herself is quite innocent. The book was begun and completed in some nine or ten weeks, between the end of July and some time in October, 1378, and she clearly spoke straight on, day after day. The only way to follow the drift of her thought is to mark the points at which she pauses to summarise what she has said, or to give thanks to God for His instruction, or ask for light on new subjects.

Disregarding the notes of the later scribe

[1] Thus the *Trattato della Discrezione* is made to cover fifty-six chapters (9-64). Discretion is really the subject of only three chapters (9-11) in the introductory section closed by the summary in Chapter 12.

and following the clues left by Catherine herself we find that her first twelve chapters form an introduction, partly personal; 13-30 are a Cry for Mercy and an exposition of Christ as the means of it, the Bridge by which man ascends from earth to heaven; 31-55 are on Sin and its Remedy; 56-86, on the Upward Way; 87-96, on Tears as the symbols of vain and saving grief; 97-107, on the Illumination of the Soul and the restraint of the judgments which those so illuminated may be tempted to pass on others; 108-134, on the inevitable subjects of such judgments in 1378, the defects and wickedness of the ministers of the Church; 135-153, on the nature of God's Providence by which wickedness is permitted; 154-165, on the nature of Obedience which in Catherine's view made it deadly sin to revolt against the rulers of the Church, however wicked, and of the higher obedience of those who take monastic vows. Finally, 166-167 form a brief conclusion. Even with this bald summary we can begin to see how

intensely personal and relevant to its day is the book which the saint dictated in the late summer of 1378 at the end of her vain struggle to make the Florentines reverence as a loving father the Pope who sent "devils incarnate" to torture Italy, and the Pope to reform the Church and be indeed a loving father even to the rebellious.

The book begins with a personal experience of St Catherine (who speaks of herself as *alcuna serva di Dio*) in the autumn of 1377. Her whole life had become a continuous prayer, based on her long discipline in knowledge of herself and of the goodness of God, and one day there came to her a great revelation of the love which God has for His servants. Wishing "in more manly wise" (*virilmente*, Catherine's great word, is untranslatable) to know and follow the truth she made four petitions: the first for herself (since the soul cannot profit another, unless it first profits itself); the second for the reform of the Church; the third in general for all the world, and specially for the peace of

the rebels against the Church ; the fourth for the Divine Providence over all things, and especially for "a particular case," which seems, though this is not certain, to have been that of her beloved confessor, Fra Raimondo, from whom she was now separated. Her longing was great and grew greater when the First Truth showed her the neediness of the world and in what a tempest of offence against God it lay. In her grief for the offence and her joyous hope that God would provide against so great evils, she attained to the communion in which the soul seems to bind itself fast with God, and knows better His truth ("the soul being then in God, and God in the soul, as the fish is in the sea and the sea in the fish"), and desire came upon her for the morning to hear Mass, the day being a feast of Mary. When the morning came and the hour of Mass she knelt in the stress of desire, and with great knowledge of herself, taking shame for her imperfections, and seeming to herself the cause of the evil done over all the world. In this knowledge

and hatred of herself, with a holy justice she cleansed the sins which she found in her soul of guilt, and as to the punishment of them she prayed that God would punish her offences in this finite time, and since she by her sins was the cause of the pains which her neighbours (*i.e.* all she wanted to help) must bear, she prayed God to visit them also on her. It seemed to her that the Eternal Truth accepted her desire, but the Divine voice answered her that all the pains which the soul could suffer in this life would not be enough for the punishment of one smallest sin, because sin done against the Infinite needs infinite satisfaction; but love and sorrow are enough, because these are themselves infinite, and avail not only the soul that offers them, but others also, unless these shut themselves off. God loves to be so constrained to mercy, not only by His own charity, but by the prayers, desires and sorrow of His servants, who can attain to virtue only as they pay their neighbour their debt of love, and overcome the self-love

which is the root of every evil. To love God and to love our neighbour is one self-same thing, because love of our neighbour flows from God, who could easily have made each of us self-sufficing, but willed that we should have need one of another. Out of this love spring all the virtues, the dispositions of the soul of which all outward actions are the instruments, to be used in accordance with discretion; the true knowledge, rooted in humility, which the soul has of itself and of God. It is discretion which teaches us that penances and other bodily exercises are merely means to an end, to be omitted if need be; that we must not seek to profit others by sinning ourselves; and again, that act and thought must be united in sacrifice as a vessel with the water it contains. This praise of discretion (the virtue by which, as we might say, we see life steadily and see it whole) is rounded off by one of St Catherine's little pictures, a diagram in its simplicity, showing how love, humility and discretion must all be united in the soul.

At the end of this introduction comes a praise of God for His gifts to man, and a cry that God will turn His anger against her but have mercy on His people. In reply God laments over the whole world and shows His *dolcissima figliuola* the universe held in the hollow of His hand. She yearns to sweat blood, and carries the soul of her confessor before the Divine Goodness, bringing back that lesson that we must bear ourselves *virilmente*, which she so often preached to him. In her trance she sees how sin having broken the road to heaven Christ became the Bridge. There are three steps in the Bridge, His feet, His side, His mouth, corresponding to the first affection of the soul, to love and peace. The stones of the Bridge are virtues, its hostelry the Eucharist. It reaches to heaven and yet abides on earth. Beneath the bridge flows a river, the river of Sin, and here for some sixteen chapters we have a Dominican treatise on sin and its punishment, followed by a vision of the joy of God's servants who in seeing Him know,

and in knowing Him they love, and in loving Him lose all will but to do His. Then the vision of the Bridge recurs, and we have the doctrine of the Upward Way. The three steps of the Bridge become first the three powers of the soul, Memory, Intellect and Will, and then its three states, that of the Mercenary Servant, the Faithful Servant, and the Loving Son. To the third state[1] the soul rises by persevering in love when the comfort of God's presence is withdrawn. He who cannot rise to this state cannot love his neighbour unselfishly, but will always be looking for the comfort of his friendship. But to be able to love God and Man unselfishly, for themselves and not for what we can get from them, is the Peace of the Soul.

The next ten chapters of the *Della Dottrina*

[1] Catherine distinguishes two aspects in this state: the one that of the soul's utter love of God regardless of all spiritual consolations and delights, the other that of its perfect union in Him which is itself supreme delight, so that the soul which disregards its own delight attains it. These two aspects she calls the third and fourth states, but regards them as inseparable.

form a little mediæval treatise on Tears, the five kinds of them and how they are connected with the different states of the soul, and of the fruits of tears, and of those who cannot weep. Catherine valued tears, but speaks of them in the spirit of her praise of "Discretion," so that she connects them with her deepest doctrine. In the same way in the next ten chapters she sets out problems in their origin personal to herself in such a way that the answers to them are among the most helpful in her book. If, she asks, in her intercession for individual souls she sees one full of light and desire for God and another dark and troubled, or one disciplining itself with great penances and another not, is she to pass any judgment as to their spiritual state? And again, how is she to distinguish the visions which God sends her from the evil counterfeits of them? In one of her letters she had made the test of visions to consist partly in the good vision beginning in bitterness and ending in joy, while the evil begins with joy and ends in bitterness; here the answer she

receives assumes that good and evil visions may be alike in their sweetness, but the good strengthens the soul for right action and the evil does not. As regards the judgment of other souls the answer takes a wider scope than the question. It contemplates the possession of such supernormal powers of reading the thoughts of others, even at a distance, as Catherine herself undoubtedly possessed; but even the *illuminata*, she is told, cannot see what God is doing with another soul, or what the soul is doing with itself, and God alone can pass right judgments. The answer, moreover, applies not only to judgments, but to all remonstrance and reproof. Even where there is strong presumption of evil in the individual soul the condemnation must be as of a sin to which reprover and reproved are both liable, and only at the unmistakable bidding of the Holy Spirit must the individual sinner be denounced. This, as we see abundantly in her letters, was the method which Catherine herself had been led to adopt, and though like other methods of

dealing with sin it has been debased by those who follow it in form but not in spirit, it is the method of the love of Christ.

After renewed thanksgiving Catherine makes intercession for the mystical body of the Church, for her spiritual children and for her two confessors, and then asks as to the defects of the Church's ministers. The answer dwells first on the dignity of the priesthood and on the virtue of the sacrament of the Body of Christ which no defect of the celebrant can lessen. It is against God's will that laymen should take upon them to punish bad priests; they should reverence priests as priests, whether they be good or bad. But the iniquity of priests and ministers is great. In the forefront is the sin of injustice in the failure of the hierarchy to correct those subject to them. Lasciviousness, unnatural lust, luxury, avarice (shown more especially in buying and selling benefices and prelacies), pride and all forms of self-love are rampant. The condemnation is measured, but unsparing, and the assertion of the evils is put, we

must remember, into the mouth of God Himself. Yet to the same source is attributed an absolute prohibition of the punishment of evil priests or bishops by laymen. These evil priests must be prayed for, and left for God to deal with. In this, as in all her teaching, Catherine was a faithful follower of St Dominic. Nevertheless it is significant of how hardly even her faith was tried that it is at this point [1] that she grappled with the problem of evil in the section *Della Divina Providentia* which has been taken as an alternative, though it is a less suitable, title to her book. In her anguish she had cried:

"To thee, Father eternal, all things are possible: granted that Thou hast made us without ourselves, but to save us without ourselves—this Thou wilt not do; yet I pray Thee that Thou force their will and dispose

[1] In the only modern English translation of the *Dialogo* (that by Mr Algar Thorold. London, 1896) this section is altogether omitted and its title transferred to the first nine chapters of the Introduction!

them to will that which of themselves they do not. And this I ask of Thee by Thy infinite mercy."

It is the last cry of the despairing sinner, that God will *make* him good despite himself; the last cry of the lover of men, that God will make them into decent puppets rather than let them make themselves devils. That St Catherine could not refrain from it at the end of her meditation on the sins of the priesthood shows how deeply she felt. Then she stills her mind and listens as the inner voice, which seemed to her not her own but that of God Himself, tells once more the story of man's first disobedience, of redemption by Christ for all who place their hope in Him, and of the absolute providence of God, so that nothing happens to His creatures which is not in accord with this providence, and all that God permits is for our good and our salvation. Catherine was a woman of the fourteenth century, instructed by confessors of its most strictly orthodox order,

and to believe equally whole-heartedly in God's omnipotence and man's free will was her settled faith, despite the cry which anguish had wrung from her. It was impossible that she should believe, as perhaps the Church may yet come to believe, that as Christ in a measure emptied Himself of His divinity in taking our flesh, so in giving man free will, even though it be a limited free will, God in a measure emptied Himself of His omnipotence, and took the great adventure of leading man from stage to stage by the grace which man will accept. She finds the firm ground of experience in her belief that to those who trust in God nothing can ever come amiss; that God, in her pretty phrase, can always bring a rose out of our thorns. There is, indeed, no section of her book more full of beauty than this, and we may guess that as her orthodox belief, clad in such richness of phrase, was poured out from her unconscious mind, the recital brought her peace.

That the last section of the *Libro della*

*Dottrina* treats of Obedience should seem inevitable if we have rightly traced its thread of thought. If no wickedness of her ministers can impair the spiritual authority of the Church, and if all that God permits He permits for our good and our salvation, then Obedience to spiritual authority is a cardinal virtue, and the Pope being Christ's Vicar, "Christ on Earth" in the uncompromising phrase which Catherine so often used, all Christians are bound to obey him unto death. Disobedience spells misery, obedience spells peace, and happy are they who, not content with a general obedience, take on them, and faithfully practise, the special obedience to which the religious orders were vowed, and in the boats provided by St Francis or St Dominic find themselves safely steered to heaven.

This, save for a brief general summary and an impassioned thanksgiving, is the end of St Catherine's *Della Dottrina*, and those who hold a different view of the authority of the Church will prefer the ideal of obedience set

forth in the life of Blessed Joan. Some readers may even find themselves more in sympathy with John Wyclif, who, less than two years before it was dictated, had been delivering in lectures at Oxford his treatise *De Dominio Divino*, in which he maintained that all property being held of God its tenure is forfeited by those who do not use it righteously (*i.e.* in doing the work which God gives them to do), and that it rests with the Civil Power to divert to more faithful hands the temporal possessions of the Church if wrongly employed. Wyclif's theory of property (sound enough in itself) was greedily seized on by politicians with no more desire to do God's will than the creatures of the court who enriched themselves with English church lands in the sixteenth century. The Lady Poverty, to whom St Francis had vowed himself, is praised by St Catherine at the end of her section on God's Providence almost as St Francis had praised her. We know from her letters that she thought it monstrous

that the Church should cling to temporal rule and possessions to the hindrance of its work. But she was unfalteringly sure that the Church must be left to divest itself voluntarily of its temporalities, and this, then as now, the Church had not love and faith enough to do. Catherine and Wyclif aimed at the same end, the conversion of the world by a purified Church, and each was used to lend colour and authority to men who pursued a policy of covetousness and power.

When those with whom rest great decisions refuse to do right the followers of Christ are often left with no alternatives but a choice of wrongs, and find themselves in strange camps. In the months before she dictated her book Catherine had been, in outward seeming, in the same camp with the cardinal who ordered the massacre of Cesena and Sir John Hawkwood, our English contribution to the devils incarnate who made Italy as hell. When the peace between Florence and the Pope freed her to return to Siena it is evident that she took her three years'

diplomacy into the presence of God to review them there, and that the *Libro della Dottrina* was the outcome. She had failed utterly. It was no merely wild exaggeration of her own importance which made her see herself as guilty of all the sin and misery which she had witnessed. She had set out to win Florentines and Pope to the spirit of Christ, and Florentines and Pope alike would have none of it. Her love, her faith, had not sufficed. But if we contrast her book, with its penetration to the very heart of the spiritual life, its serenity, its sanity, its unfaltering trust in God, with the narratives of other unsuccessful diplomatists, so full of themselves, so eager to lay bare the faults of others, we may get some inkling of what it means to be a saint, and how great a saint was she who dictated it. From her death-bed she wrote of the *Della Dottrina* as the book in which she had found some recreation, *il libro nel quale io trovava alcuna recreazione.* We must not let our English use of "recreation" as a synonym for "diversion"

or "amusement" belittle the meaning of this reference to it. Between the agony of her failure to make peace between Rome and its rebels and the deeper agony of the Great Schism there was an interval of a few weeks, in which her book was composed. The book itself shows us whence St Catherine gained strength to face the second agony and to labour incessantly, unto death, for the unity of Christendom. In those few weeks of rest she had found "some recreation" in lifting up her tired soul into the presence of God in the meditations which sum up her belief and form a bequest to her lovers which, because of its difficulty, they have very insufficiently esteemed.

# CHAPTER V

## THE BURDEN OF THE CHURCH: ROME

BEFORE Catherine had finished dictating her *Libro della Dottrina* at Siena the Great Schism had begun. The Romans had made up their minds that there should be no more French popes. Urban V. (Guillaume de Grimoard) had come to Rome in 1368, only to return to Avignon in less than two years. Gregory XI. (Pierre Roger de Beaufort) had come to Rome in 1377, largely at Catherine's instigation, and rumour said that only death had prevented him also from returning to his own country. The new Pope must be, if possible, a Roman, at least an Italian. At the time of Gregory's death there were six cardinals at Avignon and sixteen at Rome, only four of these Italian, no fewer than ten French. By a bull issued by the late Pope the cardinals present at Rome were authorised

to elect his successor by a two to one majority without waiting for those at Avignon to join them. The Romans had the sixteen in their power, and there can be no doubt that they put all the pressure on them they could, frankly and flagrantly. The attitude of the cardinals is prettily summarised in the assertion of one of them that he was ready, he hoped, to die for the faith, but not for the nationality of a Pope.

There seems good reason to believe that, as a compromise between contending parties, a majority had resolved beforehand to nominate Bartolommeo Prignano, a Neapolitan who had resided at Avignon, accompanied Gregory to Rome and been made by him Archbishop of Bari. He was elected, but when his name was announced to the crowd which surrounded the Vatican, it appears to have been mistaken for that of Jean de Bar, a relation of Gregory XI., and the fury of the mob was so great that the frightened electors arrayed Francesco Tebaldeschi, the old cardinal of St Peter's, in the papal robes

and presented him as their choice. But the next day their real election was solemnly confirmed, announced to the people and quietly accepted. On 18th April (Easter Sunday) the new Pope was crowned and the cardinals rode in procession with him, no question being raised as to the validity of what had been done. Had Urban VI., the title taken by Prignano, proved a Pope to their liking; had he shown Christian moderation, or ordinary prudence and courtesy, it seems certain that the great majority of the cardinals would have sustained his election, and highly probable that, in view of this certainty, it would have passed without formal challenge. Unhappily Urban was a man of violent and overbearing temper and his promotion from an unimportant archbishopric to the "seat of St Peter" completely unbalanced him. There is no question that, at any rate at the outset, he genuinely desired the reform of the Church; but his attitude to the hierarchy was that which an old-fashioned colonel might have adopted

when given the command of a regiment suspected of disaffection, and he could not even refrain from insulting his own supporters, laymen as well as clerics, with disastrous results to his cause.

During May and June the French cardinals one after another left Rome and assembled at Anagni. Before breaking finally with Urban they summoned a body of French mercenaries stationed at Viterbo to come to their protection, and on 16th July these came into collision with Roman troops, whom they defeated. Having thus burnt their boats the cardinals proceeded to declare Urban's election null and void, and after a solemn service formally anathematised him as an antipope on 9th August. On 20th September, having removed to Fondi, they elected Cardinal Robert of Geneva, who had ordered the massacre at Cesena, as a rival Pope under the title of Clement VII. Three Italian cardinals were present, but took no part in the election. One of them, Cardinal Orsini, died still a neutral in August,

1379; the other two then openly became Clementines, and Pedro de Luna, a Spanish cardinal, who had been the last of the foreign cardinals to abandon Urban, a little later on became Clement's most vigorous supporter, and finally his successor as antipope.

In Catherine, to whom martyrdom appeared the highest prize which life could offer, the plea of the cardinals, that in their election of Urban they had been constrained by fear, inspired mingled incredulity and contempt. Soon after Urban's election she had written him one of her most characteristic letters, full of ardent desire that he would be a good shepherd, ready to lay down his life for his sheep, and careful in his appointment of those to whom the sheep must look for nourishment. From these exhortations she passed to an impassioned plea on behalf of the Florentines, still at the time she wrote outside the fold by their excommunication. Even if they do not ask for mercy as they should, let his holiness supply their imperfection, accept from the diseased what they

can give and have compassion on so many souls that are perishing. If he will but be tender to them they will be better sons to him than others, and she makes the strongest possible plea for the city which had disowned and flouted her as its envoy.

Another early letter from Catherine to Urban prays him to have patience with those who are trying to help him, and in particular with one of her own disciples who had angered him through ignorance. In a third letter she again exhorts Urban to patience, but this time in view of the attacks of his enemies, the election of an antipope being already pending. Charity, she tells him, will make his bitterness sweet and his burdens light. Though he see himself abandoned by those who should be as pillars to support him, let him go forward, seeking the Divine aid, and enlisting the help of the Servants of God who will give him faithful counsel. The next time she writes she has heard that the "demons incarnate" (St Catherine was rather fond of the phrase) have elected "not a Christ

on earth" but an Antichrist in opposition to him who is Christ on earth, and she makes her personal confession: "I confess and deny not that you are Vicar of Christ who hold the keys of the cellar of Holy Church, where is the blood of the immaculate lamb, and that you are the minister of it, let him gainsay it who will." So she incites Urban to his spiritual war and at the same time shows a tender anxiety for his personal safety.

If we turn now from the letters which Catherine wrote to the Pope to those she wrote on his behalf we shall find a fiery presentation of his case in the letter to the three Italian cardinals who, while they had abstained from voting for the antipope, had yet sanctioned the conclave at Fondi by their presence. Even in her customary opening formula she shows her uncompromising position: "Dear Brothers and Fathers in Christ, sweet Jesus, I Catherine, servant and slave of Jesus Christ, write to you in His precious blood, with desire to see you turned to true and perfect light, escaping from the

great darkness and blindness in which you have fallen. Then you will be fathers to me: otherwise, not. So it is that I call you fathers in so far as you depart from death and turn to life, united in faith and perfect obedience to Pope Urban VI., the obedience in which those stand who have light and with light recognise the truth and in recognising love it." Wealth and worldly honour and the life of the body are all as nothing and it is only the shadow of self-love which hinders us from seeing it. The persecution to which they and the others have subjected and are subjecting the Church of the Spouse of Christ, at the time when they should be her shields in opposing the onslaughts of heresy, shows them to be ingrates and mercenaries. Let them know and recognise the truth that Pope Urban VI. is truly Pope, Supreme Pontiff, elected with ordered election and without fear, in truth rather by Divine inspiration than by their effort. So they announced, and that was the truth. Now they had turned their backs like unworthy knights, frightened by

their own shadows. What was the cause? The poison of self-love, which has poisoned the world. It was not that they were blinded by ignorance. They knew what was the truth, and had announced it. Now they would cheat the truth, saying that they elected Pope Urban through fear. The man whom they clearly did elect through fear was the cardinal of St Peter's. Of the ordered election with which they chose Messer Bartolommeo, the Archbishop of Bari, now in truth Pope Urban VI., the solemnity of his coronation is sufficient proof, and the reality of the solemnity is vouched for by the reverence they showed him and the favours for which they asked.

The letter ends with strenuous exhortations, by turns threatening and tender, that the cardinals will return to the way of truth and acknowledge Urban. The modern reader may think that Catherine was a little too ready to look on her opponents as "demons incarnate," but she had good reasons for regarding these as traitors both

to Italy and to the Church, and if they were traitors through weakness or unconscious self-seeking (each of them may well have thought that he would make a better Italian pope than Urban) rather than from hardened wickedness, it was Catherine's object to awake them to a sense of what they were doing.

Urban had known Catherine during her stay at Avignon, and realised the help which she might give him. In October he sent her a message through Fra Raimondo bidding her come to Rome, and when she pleaded that her much travelling had already caused scandal at Siena and among the sisters of her Order, and asked either to be excused or to receive a positive command, the command was sent in due form as a "precept of holy obedience." Catherine obeyed at once and came to Rome with a company of men and women, who lived in voluntary poverty, she herself begging with the rest.

Urban was delighted at Catherine's arrival

and bade her give an address, with special reference to the Schism, before his new cardinals. She stirred them to fortitude, showed how the providence of God is ever present, more especially in the sufferings of the Church, and that the beginning of the Schism should make them no whit afraid; they should do all the things that belonged to God and fear nothing. Her words gave Urban new confidence and he told his cardinals: "This bit of a woman (*donniciuola*) puts us to shame; while we are afraid she is without fear and comforts us with her persuasiveness." A few days later he proposed to send her and another Catherine, daughter of St Bridget of Sweden, to Queen Giovanna of Naples, to detach her from the antipope Clement. Catherine of Sweden refused point blank. Her brother had died in thraldom to an adulterous passion for Giovanna and she would have nothing to do with her. Raimondo also had doubts lest the Queen might not plot against the good name of two virgin envoys, and the Pope gave

up his plan. When Raimondo reported this to Catherine of Siena she remarked: "If Agnes and Margaret had thought thus they would never have won the martyr's crown"; but Urban's second thoughts prevailed. A little later he chose Raimondo himself as one of two envoys to the King of France. As if she foresaw the future Catherine talked with him long, apart from any others, of the revelations and consolations she had received from the Lord, and came to see him aboard his galley. As it moved away she knelt in prayer and then with tears in her eyes made the sign of the cross, as if in farewell. She had from the first regarded the help of Raimondo as her confessor as a gift from Mary, but he stood in a double relation to her, and now when he could no longer help her as her spiritual father he was to disappoint her grievously as a son. He had stuck to his post at Siena during the plague and was probably not without courage; but after his fellow-envoy had been arrested on the frontier and thrown into prison, news came to him of

a plot against his own life, and he returned to Genoa. Urban, to whom he wrote for further orders, approved his staying at Genoa as his agent, but to Catherine his retreat seemed pusillanimous and her letter as to it is a touching mixture of affection and reproach.

As soon as she arrived in Rome Catherine seems to have busied herself in carrying out her scheme of rallying round Urban the "servants of God," the men, several of them hermits, who had gained for themselves spiritual influence without holding any high office in the Church. She seems to have selected those who should be asked to come, and when they responded to the call they were lodged in the house assigned to her in Rome, and shared her life of voluntary poverty. On 13th December she forwarded a bull which she had obtained from the Pope to Bartolommeo Serafini, the prior of a Carthusian monastery on the island of Gorgona, which she had visited at the time of her mission in Pisa, preaching to the monks

and edifying them greatly, more especially their prior. It was plainly at her instigation that the task was now laid on him of conveying the Pope's will to several of those whose presence was desired, and Catherine prays him to lay everything else aside and devote himself to summoning the other devout persons whose names are given. One of these was William Flete, a Cambridge bachelor of divinity, who had lived for many years as a hermit in a wood not far from Siena, practising great austerities, and attaining in contemplation and vision a sense of communion with God which was a great "consolation" to him amid the wickedness which was desolating Italy. To all the ascetics whom the Pope, at Catherine's instigation, summoned to his aid, obedience entailed a very real sacrifice. William Flete alone was obstinate in his refusal to come, and thus drew from her a very instructive exposition of the relative value of obedience and spiritual consolations. It did not move him from his resolution, but he worked hard

and successfully for Urban in letters, one of which produced a great effect in England, and the breach between them did not last long.

Throughout 1379 Catherine remained at Rome doing all she could for Urban, both by word and letter, and constant prayer. In January she wrote the letter to the three Italian cardinals which has already been quoted. In April Urban had two successes: the Castle of Sant' Angelo, which had been held against him by French mercenaries (who thus prevented him from occupying the Vatican), was surrendered to the Roman people, and on the last day of the month the Italian mercenaries in his pay defeated Clement's French mercenaries at Marino. These were but sorry victories, but they were useful, and Urban went in procession from Santa Maria in Trastevere (where he had lodged while Sant' Angelo was held against him) to St Peter's. At the suggestion of Catherine he walked barefoot, a mark of humility for which there was no papal pre-

cedent for some centuries, and which appears never to have been repeated.

While thus bringing her influence to bear on Urban Catherine within a week of these successes wrote letters of praise and exhortation to the soldiers of the Roman Republic and the captain of the Italian mercenaries (the Compagnia di San Giorgio, some of whom were on the point of transferring their services to Clement!) by whom they had been achieved. She wrote also to the King of France and to Queen Giovanna of Naples, in the hope, doubtless, that the double defeat of the Clementines would win a readier hearing for her spiritual arguments. Unless her letter to the Queen was carried very quickly by the time it arrived Giovanna had already been temporarily converted by a popular rising, provoked by Clement taking refuge at her court on 10th May. After a stay of three days he returned whence he came and on the 10th his terrified hostess publicly acknowledged Urban as Pope. She repeated this acknowledgment in an answer to

Catherine's letter, and the saint called on her friends to rejoice that "whether it be by force or by love" God had enlightened the Queen's heart, and had shown in her His wonderful works. Giovanna proved quite clearly that her conversion was enforced by returning to the Clementine party a few weeks later, and her letter to Catherine was probably prompted more by diplomacy than any sense of sin. Had Catherine been permitted to go herself to Naples she would have dominated Giovanna as she had dominated Gregory and to a less extent Urban. But her letters, though they glow with utter conviction of the righteousness of her cause and love for those to whom she was writing, never seem to have worked any result comparable to that of her presence. In this year she wrote others to the governments of Siena, Florence and Perugia, to Louis of Hungary and Charles of Durazzo, and made one more attempt to win Giovanna's heart. Doubtless she conferred a certain prestige on Urban's cause by her spiritual diplomacy,

but of any tangible results from it there seems no trace. The best help that she gave Urban was in keeping him from the insanities of fury to which he yielded when her influence was removed.

So through 1379 Catherine worked on amid a strain which, as she saw the fruitlessness of her efforts, must have become crushing! With the new year a great bodily change came over her, but still she struggled to continue her work, though now it was pain to her not only to eat, but even to swallow a sip of water, so that she was tormented with thirst. On Sexagesima Sunday, which came at the end of January, she had a seizure while at vespers; the next evening, after she had written a letter to the Pope, it was renewed so violently that she was mourned as dead and lay long without any sign of life. Yet her will was unweakened and nine days later, when Lent began, imposed new tasks on herself. Every morning she received the Communion and then, after an hour or two's rest, walked swiftly the long mile from the

Via del Papa (near the Campo di Fiori), where she was now living, to St Peter's and remained there till vespers in prayer so fervent that an observer tells us one day of it exhausted that bit of a body as much as two of the strappado would a man's, and she returned home looking a dead woman. From the third Sunday in Lent she was notably worse and lay for eight weeks so weak that she could not raise her head, and racked from head to foot with intolerable pains. She herself believed that God had given the demons power to torment her body at will, and Raimondo tells us that this torment she had taken on herself to expiate the sins of Rome against Urban. Her face retained its look of heaven, its breath of devotion, but her body had wasted away, and she had hardly strength to turn from one side to the other. Two hours before dawn on the Sunday before Ascension Day there was a further change in her and it was thought the end was near. Her "family" gathered round her, and she received

absolution and extreme unction. For an hour and a half she suffered grievously, then her face cleared, and the clouded eyes became calm and joyous, and with a little help she raised herself, leaning still against one of her women friends in whose arms she had been lying. She confessed her sins anew—all she had left undone to seek her own consolation; all her sloth and negligence in the agony to which God invited her for the reform of the Church; the little help she had given to those committed to her; her faithlessness to her Divine Bridegroom. Turning to the priest beside her she asked again for the plenary absolution granted her by both Gregory and Urban. Her words came hardly and could with difficulty be heard, but still she prayed for the Church, for which she said she died, for Urban, for all her spiritual sons and daughters. At last she made the sign of the cross and blessed them, and so coming to the goal of her desire, she prayed: "Thou Lord callest me and I come to thee, not through my merits, but only through thy

mercy, which I beg of thee in virtue of thy blood, thy blood," and with the words of Christ: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit," bent her head joyously and died.

# CHAPTER VI

## EPILOGUE

CATHERINE died about noon on 29th April 1380. Her body was borne to the Church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva by Stefano Maconi, most beloved of her disciples, and lay there until the evening of 1st May, when it was given solemn burial under Urban's directions. As long as that tired little body remained there, the church was crowded with worshippers, who called aloud for Catherine's prayers, and found themselves healed of their diseases, as the Sienese country-folk had been when she ministered to them at the Rocca. She had lived at Rome for seventeen months, and must have been a familiar figure in its streets, where she had sought help in her voluntary poverty and given it in her generous love. Men and women had seen her in the intensity of her

prayers at St Peter's in the early days of Lent; they knew something at least of what she had done to bring Gregory back to Italy, to end the war between him and the Florentines, to support Urban against a French antipope. They had no doubt that she was a saint.

To the members of her *famiglia* and the larger circle of her disciples it seemed no less imperative that Catherine should be enrolled among the saints of the Church. Many of them had intimate personal knowledge of her supernormal powers which had been manifested on their behalf: all had been uplifted by her spiritual influence. Within four years of her death her confessor, Fra Raimondo delle Vigne, began collecting materials for a biography which is somewhat too obviously written as a document in support of her canonisation. This was completed in 1395, and a few years later Catherine's festival was being informally observed in Dominican churches at Venice. In 1411 the Bishop held an inquiry into the justification for this

observance, and more particularly as to a sermon which had been preached by one of her disciples. At this inquiry many of those who had known her personally, some of them by this time men of considerable influence in the Church, offered their testimony to her life and work. As a result whatever sanction a bishop could give to a cult still unauthorised by formal canonisation was duly accorded, and the depositions remain as a source of knowledge of Catherine's life rivalling that of Fra Raimondo's *Legenda*, though unfortunately not equally accessible.

Catherine's formal canonisation was probably delayed by the Great Schism and also (alas for the followers of Poverello!) by Franciscan jealousy of the Dominicans. It came in June, 1461, when Pius II. (Enea Silvio Piccolomini) wrote with his own hand the bull raising her to the rank of a saint, his patriotism as, like Catherine, a native of Siena, helping, no doubt, to overcome an inclination towards scepticism which made him scrutinise unfavourably the claims put

forward for Joan of Arc. So Catherine became a "saint," and doubtless, when the news reached her, felt her own "nothingness" more deeply than ever, though, if it encouraged people to ask for her prayers, that was surely a delight to her. "Fear not; I am in heaven for you; I will protect and defend you; be without care and fear nothing" her voice had told Fra Raimondo at Genoa at the hour which he subsequently learnt was that of her death; and no one who has understood her rightly can imagine any survival of her personality in which the desire to take upon herself the burdens of others could wax faint.

While Catherine lived on earth the desire to take upon herself the burden of others was ever with her, and she pushed it to a point which it is easy to think of as extravagant. When she began her life as an anchoress in her little room at Siena it was mainly in penance for the sins of others that she scourged her body, fasted and restricted her sleep. As has already been told, when

her father died she believed that she gained his release from purgatory at the price of a new pain in her side, which never left her. In her last illness, according to Fra Raimondo, she regarded her worst agonies as sent in answer to her prayer that she might bear the temporal punishment of the people of Rome for their sins against Urban. In her *Della Dottrina* she recognises quite clearly that no intensity of suffering can cleanse the soul from the guilt of sin; but in common with her contemporaries she believed that justice demanded sin to be punished not only by its temporal consequences but magisterially, and it was this magisterial punishment which she desired to bear (here, in "time" rather than in eternity) not only for her own sins but for those of others. We ourselves may believe that the magical value which has been attributed to magisterial punishments is an illusion; that the only God-sent punishment for our sins in thought, word or deed (over and above their natural consequences) is the realisation of the havoc

which they have wrought in our own lives and those of others. But in the fourteenth century the belief in the righteousness of magisterial punishments, as distinct from reformative, and even as distinct from deterrent ones, was universal. The only point in which Catherine stood alone, or nearly alone, was that, whereas her contemporaries desired and rejoiced to inflict them on others, she longed to take as much as possible of them on herself.

This ardour of disinterested love was united in Catherine with exceptional intellectual strength, and it is the union in her of these two gifts that makes her one of the supreme exponents of the ideal of Chastity and one of the most helpful of saints. In the view of this sceptical disciple of hers, her early austerities and the supernormal powers which may possibly have been connected with them, though they both helped greatly to secure her formal canonisation, were in themselves temptations quite as much as graces. She herself felt at least something

of the kind. It is hard for any woman who tries to serve God and her fellows with the ardour of a saint to escape the accusation of doing so for the sake of "notoriety," and (as we have seen) Catherine did not escape it. On her death-bed that old charge recurred to her, and she was heard repelling it in a whisper to herself: "Never vainglory, but the true glory and praise of the Lord" ("*Non mai la vanagloria, ma sì la gloria vera e la lode del Signor*"). Because they saw the temptations those who distrusted her (and many of her most loyal disciples began with distrust) thought that she must needs be yielding to them. The miracle of her sainthood is that she did not yield to them; but the temptations were there, and it is because out of these temptations she emerges with the very opposite characteristics to those which any psychologist would expect that she is so great and so helpful.

In obedience to the ideals of her day, Catherine had tortured her body at precisely the age when it is most dangerous for a

woman to torture it; she had visions so vivid that she could not doubt their reality and which yet might have led a weaker nature to the verge of religious mania; she developed supernormal powers which, not only might have been used to the destruction of the personality of others, but must have been so bewildering to herself that they might easily have led to the destruction of her own. Yet alike in her actions, in her letters, in her book she is ever, not merely sane, but sane with a spiritual and intellectual chastity which is one of the rarest of gifts. Intellectually she was chaste in her unswerving adherence to what she believed to be truth; alike as a thinker and as a diplomatist any kind of compromise was impossible to her. She was chaste also in her refusal to judge others, even those the secrets of whose hearts were revealed to her, and in the high value which she set on discretion, the spiritual power which helps us to see life steadily and see it whole. Through all her dealings with men and women we find a constant respect

for their personality. For herself she sought neither power, nor fame, nor gratitude; she sought nothing but opportunities to serve and suffer. She loved God and man unselfishly, for themselves and not for the consolations she could get from them, and so attained to that purity of heart which brings with it the vision of God, which is the only true peace of the soul.

Catherine had her visions of God and believed not only that she had taken her Lord Christ as her betrothed but that He had accepted her. Yet while she lived on earth she sedulously denied herself this peace which He had promised, in order to take upon herself the agony of the sins of others. She bent her soul so utterly to this burden that she saw herself as guilty of the sins of all the world. If she could only love those she was trying to help as God loved them, she could help them, she thought, as God was yearning that by some fellow-creature they should be helped. But because her love was too weak she could not help them

as she should, so that it was her fault, her failure, that they sinned, and there was no slander that could be said of her, no insult that could be offered her, no wrong that could be done to her that she counted unreasonable or undeserved.

Stated as a dogma Catherine's belief breaks down. The love of Christ Himself cannot save those who will not be saved. But it is love which saves all who have the will to be saved, and it is the love that persists through failure which wins the will. The Florentines who had sent Catherine to Avignon disowned her. According to one account, the Pope whom she had brought back to Rome died cursing her. The return to Rome was itself the direct occasion of the Great Schism, which for years divided Christendom between two warring Popes. Catherine's life may be looked on as a failure as absolute as that of Him into whose Passion she entered so intimately must have seemed when night fell on Good Friday. Yet she had given her life to the thing which

is best worth doing—she had followed Christ; and because, however much she failed, her love never faltered, she spoke in her own day with some reflection of His authority, and still speaks.

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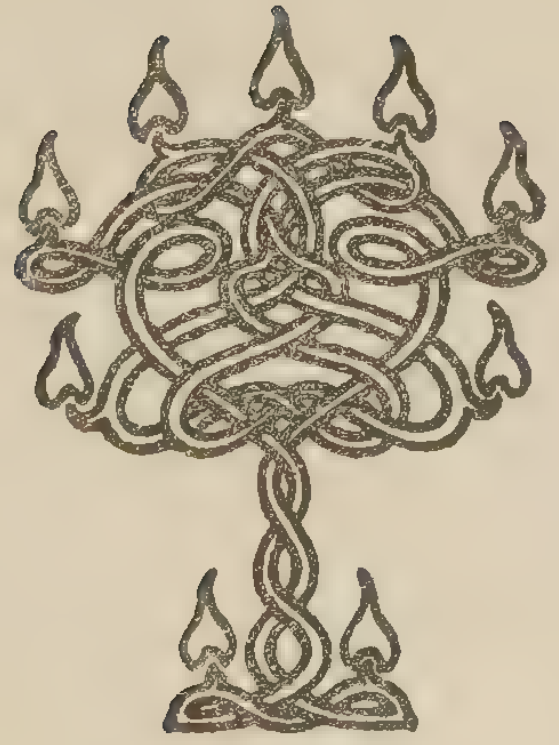

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